DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 353 609 CS 508 030

AUTHOR Sellnow, Deanna D.; Seekins, Lisa L.
TITLE Justifying Forensic Programs to Administrators: An Experiential Education Opportunity.
PUB DATE Oct 92
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (78th, Chicago, IL, October 29-November 1, 1992).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrators; *Debate; *Experiential Learning; Higher Education; Lifelong Learning; *Persuasive Discourse; Theory Practice Relationship; Thinking Skills
IDENTIFIERS Debate Tournaments

ABSTRACT

Experiential education provides an excellent justificatory framework for the forensics program as an educational opportunity. The three major tenets of experiential education are: (1) connecting theoretical knowledge to real life experiences; (2) valuing and fostering different "ways of knowing"; and (3) encouraging lifelong learning. Forensics programs offer students the opportunity to take many of the theories and skills learned in the college classroom into a real (or at least quasi-real) life setting. Forensics competition opportunities extend well beyond the few perspectives students may receive in a formal classroom. Together, the competitor, the literature, and the multiple audiences foster new and emergent ways of knowing throughout the forensic season. Forensics students develop active and critical listening skills which they will take with them in their careers and apply throughout their lives. By linking forensics education with major tenets of experiential education, perhaps some administrators who have not previously appreciated forensics education but do support experiential learning will begin to realize the inherent value of forensics education. (Twenty-two references are attached.) (RS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED353609

Justifying Forensic Programs to Administrators: An Experiential Education Opportunity

by

Dr. Deanna D. Sellnow

and

Lisa L. Seekins

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Deanna Sellnow
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

CS505030

Presented at the annual convention of the Speech Communication Association
October 29-November 1, 1992, Chicago, Illinois

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Justifying Forensic Programs to Administrators:

An Experiential Education Opportunity

Introduction

While most communication educators value the forensics program as a unique and vital part of an undergraduate degree in Speech Communication, it seems we are continually being asked to justify those programs to administrators. Evidently, administrators need help in seeing the inherent value of forensics education. Many scholars have addressed this need and formulated a variety of rationales for forensics grounded in numerous different theoretical and pedagogical frameworks (Aden, 1991; Boileau, 1990; Buys and Copeland, 1985; Faules, Rieke, Rhodes, 1976; Harris, Jr., Kropp, Jr., and Rosenthal, 1986; Hindman, Shackelford, Schlottach, 1991; Klopf, 1982; Littlefield, 1991; McMillan and Todd-Mancillas, 1991; Rice, 1991). This paper is another attempt to justify the inherent value of the forensics program via yet another pedagogical approach.

With the advent of the 1990's, a new "buzz word" has found its way into educational research. That buzz word is experiential education. Experiential education is grounded in the notion that students learn most effectively when they are afforded the opportunity to apply theories in real life contexts (Goodlad, 1984; Greene, 1988; Hutchings and Wutzdorff, 1988; Lightfoot, 1983; O'Keefe, 1986). This concept of connecting theoretical classroom learning with real life experiences provides an excellent justificatory framework for the forensics program as an educational opportunity. The goal of this paper, then, is to offer a forensics program rationale grounded in experiential education theory. To achieve this goal, three major tenets of experiential education are summarized and, subsequently, a description of how the forensics program addresses each tenet is offered. These three major tenets include: (1) connecting theoretical knowledge to real life experiences; (2) valuing and fostering different "ways of knowing;" and (3) encouraging lifelong learning. While many useful rationales for

forensics already exist, none are grounded in experiential education. Thus, this paper extends existing research in ways which may, perhaps, influence those administrators who have yet to be convinced of the worth of the forensics program as an important educational opportunity.

Connecting Theoretical Knowledge to Real Life Experiences

Experiential education presumes a connection between theoretical knowledge and real life experiences. Thus, knowledge of particular theoretical concepts is a necessary prerequisite in order for experiential education to take place. Experiential education moves beyond theoretical comprehension, however, in that students must also apply these concepts to real life experiences. Lightfoot (1983) explains:

> Schools need to provide asylum . . . from the rugged demands of outside life at the same time that they must be interactive with it. The interaction is essential. Without the connection to life beyond school, most students would find the school's rituals empty. It is this connection that motivates them [the students]. (p. 322)

This concept of experiential education is not new. It actually appeared in Dewey's (1938) progressive education philosophy: "One consideration stands out clearly when education is conceived in terms of experience. Anything which can be called a study, whether mathematics, arithmetic, history, geography, or one of the natural sciences, must be derived from materials which at the outset fall within the scope of ordinary life experience" (p. 73).

O'Keefe (1986), a more contemporary proponent of experiential learning, explains it as "communicative decentering" in contrast to the self-centered communication which often results from passive learning which takes place in many classrooms. She also expands Lightfoot's earlier contentions that connected learning motivates students, to also suggest that critical thinking is enhanced when students apply new communicative strategies to the true contexts of their lives.

Finally, Greene (1988) also conveys the need to move education beyond the classroom to the real contexts of human lives:

> There is an analogy here for the passivity and the disinterest that prevent discoveries in classrooms, that discourage inquiries, that make even reading seem irrelevant. It is not simply a matter of motivation or interest. In this context, we can call it a question having to do with freedom or, perhaps, the absence of freedom in our schools. . . . [In any field], even among the exact sciences, a heightened curiosity may accompany the growth of feelings of connection between human hands and minds and the objects of study, whether they are rocks or stars or memory cores. (pp. 124-128)

Experiential learning takes place, then, when students understand theoretical concepts presented in the classroom, are able to see the connection between these ideas and the real world outside the classroom, and can effectively apply these concepts to their own lives beyond the classroom.

How, then, does the forensics program foster this kind of learning? MacBeth stated that forensics is "an educational activity primarily concerned with using an argumentative perspective in examining problems and communicating with people" (cited in Koeppel & Morman, 1991, p. 141). By taking the theories beyond the classroom, forensics students are able to develop the content of a speech through careful organization, style and delivery. Students competing in forensics use the fundamental skills they learned in public speaking courses to create a coherent speech. For example, forensicators who compete in communication analysis must, first, conceptualize a theory. Subsequently, they use that theory to analyze an artifact from real life experience. The artifact is one of their own choosing--one which matters to them in some way. It is not an "assignment" which they must complete to fulfill the requirements of a

particular course. Rather, it is an idea or an artifact which, for the competitor, seems relevant to real life in some way. Moreover, it is their responsiblity to also show their audiences how and why this idea or artifact matters to them in their lives. Finally, these audiences are not comprised of students in a formal classroom. They are real people beyond the classroom setting who are not compelled to listen as a part of the expectations of the course. Rather, they are compelled to listen only when the speaker successfully links the content of the speech to actual life experience.

Persuasive, informative, impromptu, and extemporaneous speaking all require students to offer a thesis statement substantiated by various forms of support. These students are able to take the concepts of speech construction which they have learned in the formal classroom into a new situation. Typically, these speeches focus on contemporary issues which are prominent in news media at the time. Thus, regardless of the event, students are analyzing real life issues and taking their analysies outside of the college classroom. Moreover, students competing in the limited preparation events (extemporaneous and impromptu) are expected to recall basic public speaking fundamentals in a limited amount of time. This opportunity to practice spontaneity is a technique which will also help these students connect classroom knowledge to life experience when they eventually enter and compete in the business world, as well.

Audience analysis is another communication concept which forensic programs foster by moving beyond the formal classroom setting. Forensic competitors must analyze every audience they face. These audiences vary from region to region of the country, from school to school within a region, and from room to room at a given tournament. While it is possible to talk about audience analysis in a college classroom, the fact remains that every speech a student gives in a particular course is in front of the same group; a group often comprised of individuals very similar demographically and even psychologically to the speaker. The forensics program

affords students the opportunity to move beyond the stagnate classroom setting to really apply these audience analysis skills with their judges and peers.

Many concepts and skills centered around nonverbal communication are also embellished by the forensics program in terms of moving out of the classroom and connecting to real life experiences. Although we teach our students about nonverbal communication and reading audience feedback, more often than not, students are coerced into offering supportive feedback to other speakers in the college classroom (i.e., those who don't support their classmates while giving speeches will be judged more harshly when it's their turn to speak). While some of this coercion may still be felt in a round of forensics competition, it is much less dramatic. In fact, some unethical contestants may even attempt to "throw a speaker off" with their nonverbals during a speech. Thus, forensics competitors are able to practice reading nonverbal feedback in a closer- to-real-life setting than is the college classroom.

Forensics students are also offered an opportunity to operationalize and apply nonverbal delivery skills beyond the classroom experience. Again, while paralanguage, kinesics, chronemics, proxemics, and object language are discussed in the college classroom, few students seem to be compelled to actually employ them during their classroom speeches. It seems to suffice to be intelligible and, perhaps, poised. In the competitive forensics setting, however, intelligibility alone does not get a speaker very far. Thus, these competitors are challenged to actually apply these theories in a context where such application really matters. Forensicators who employ these concepts effectively in their delivery of public address and oral interpretation events are justly rewarded. Further, by learning to apply these skills beyond the college classroom, students learn skills which will help them stand apart in any public speaking situation which may arise in their adult lives, as well.

Connecting theoretical knowledge to real life experiences is one major tenet of

experiential education. Forensics programs offer students the opportunity to take many of the theories and skills learned in the college classroom into a real (or at least quasi-real) life setting. Nonetheless, mastery of such theories and skills rewards competitors by means other than letter grades. Further, the theories and skills which are often left untried in the college classroom must be employed effectively in the forensics setting to attain success. Finally, employing and improving such applications of classroom learning in forensics tournaments will remain a vital asset for these competitors in their adult lives, as well.

Valuing and Fostering Diverse "Ways of Knowing"

Experiential learning allows students to move beyond the classroom walls which tend to isolate and fragment learning to consider learning as it occurs throughout the daily lives of students. According to experiential education theory, learning does not come about only in the traditional classroom setting (if it does so at all in such a setting). Moreover, people learn about the world around us via our encounters with numerous symbol systems. O'Keefe (1986) claims, for example, that speakers' ideas continue to develop spontaneously even as they engage in [daily] conversation. She explains that "speaking aloud releases peripheral information that the mind has absorbed, and allows the speaker to express him or herself more fully" (p. 9). Oliver and Gershman (1989) support experiential education in that it helps foster ontological knowing. They write that experiential learning moves beyond modernity (i.e., fragmented classroom knowledge) to allow ontological knowing to emerge: "It is a connection first only felt, then expressed as art, drama, later as story and only later as science or philosophy" (p. 26). They argue further that education must search for ways to reconstrue and experience the world with greater balance and interrelatedness:

> Integration includes the deliberate search for occasions in which ontological understanding informs and relates to technical knowing. It includes activities that

enrich a broad range of metaphorical sensibilities. (p. 29)

Greene (1988) expounds further about this inherent need to challenge students to consider multiple perspectives and diverse ways of knowing: "Education for freedom must clearly focus on the range of human intelligences, the multiple languages and symbol systems available for ordering experience and making sense of the lived world" (p. 125). She argues that real learning can only take place when we are able to interpret the world through many perceptual lenses:

> Reflectiveness, even logical thinking remain important; but the *point* of cognitive development is not to gain an increasingly complete grasp of abstract principles. It is to interpret from as many vantage points as possible lived experience, the ways there are of being in the world. (p. 120)

For teachers, then, valuing other ways of knowing becomes valuing students' ways of knowing:

> Rather than posing dilemmas to students or presenting models of expertise, the caring teacher tries to look through students' eyes to struggle *with* them as subjects in search of their own projects, their own ways of making sense of the world. (p. 120)

Experiential education contends that deeper, richer, and more meaningful learning takes place when we consider the subject matter from a variety of vantage points. To do so, it is paramount that we move beyond encouraging only "technical knowing" and "fragmented knowledge" which typify many classroom experiences to also foster other "ways of knowing" as significant and relevant.

In the oral interpretation events of forensics competition, ideas are presented through the presentation of literature. One way in which competitors convey meaning of a selection is through the introduction. Koeppel and Morman (1991) write, "There is no absolute, inherent,

'real' meaning to the literature, but rather the performance is based on what the interpreter has experienced and is able to communicate through the introduction" (p. 146). Competing in these events affords students the opportunity to apply their own interpretations to a selection for competition. Of course, author intent is an important dimension in oral interpretation events. However, whenever a student interprets and then performs a work, his/her unique perspective embellishes the images and meaning intended by the author.

Further, oral interpretation events allow students to discuss important life matters via aesthetic storytelling rather than informative or persuasive speaking. As such, students communicate using a different symbol system (Greene, 1988) as an art, drama, or story (Oliver and Gerrymander, 1989). These events help students learn to communicate ideas from multiple vantage points and multiple sensibilities. For example, a student presenting a Program Oral Interpretation about the aging process might select literature focused on growing old. By selecting various pieces of literature, the competitor uses multiple vantage points. Moreover, by embellishing the written words with her/his delivery style, the audience may come to the realization that growing old can be a scary process through which one must proceed in order to eventually come to accept and even be content with fate. Certainly, a speaker could inform or even persuade an audience about this inevitable fact of life. However, a speaker presenting these ideas through an interpretive reading can reach a similar conclusion using a variety of vantage points. Thus, oral interpretation events allow competitors to learn to value and respect different ways of knowing.

Finally, competitors are also exposed to different ways of knowing when they watch and listen to other competitors interpreting their selections. Moreover, judges offer additional points of view in their critiques of performances. Forensic students face a host of judges during a typical year of competition. Thus, they are afforded many opportunities to consider a variety

of perspectives about the multiple meanings in a particular piece of literature as well as a host of ways in which to interpret that meaning aloud. Again, the forensics competition opportunities in this regard extend well beyond the few perspectives students may receive in a formal classroom (i.e., teacher perspective, performer perspective, and peer perspective). Forensicators are fortunate in that they may consider their own perspectives, their coach's perspectives, peer's perspectives, and numerous judge's perspectives. Together, the competitor, the literature, and the multiple audiences foster new and emergent ways of knowing throughout the forensic season (Koeppel and Morman, 1991).

Encouraging Lifelong Learning

Experiential education is rooted in the process philosophy of education. This philosophy suggests that the primary role of education is to help students learn how to learn rather than merely acquiring facts and procedures. Initially, lifelong learning means fostering the ability in students to ask questions and seek possible answers to those questions throughout their lives. Greene (1988) expounds upon this need to encourage inquiry:

> In the classroom opened to possibility and at once concerned with inquiry, critiques must be developed that uncover what masquerade as neutral frameworks. . . . Teachers, like their students, have to learn to love the questions, as they come to realize that there can be no final agreements or answers, no final commensurability. (p. 134)

Again, Dewey's (1938) concepts of progressive education developed some fifty years ago actually address these same kinds of critical thinking issues. When discussing questioning and inquiry skills, he cautions teachers about their role in nurturing inquiry skills on the part of students: "The way [to nurture inquiry] is, first, for the teacher to be intelligently aware of the capacities, needs, and past experiences of those under instruction, and, secondly, to allow

the suggestion made to develop into a plan and project by means of further suggestions. . . . The plan, in other words, is a co-operation, not a dictation" (pp. 71-72).

Fostering lifelong learning goes beyond learning to question and even beyond integrating curriculum between classroom and life experience. Fostering lifelong learning also includes integration between fragmented subjects. Whitehead (1922), for example, explains that "science and poetry have the same root in human nature." And, in Hendley's (1986) words, "The teaching of science, then, should contain both a hard element of factual information, laboratory work, and experimentation leading to 'the attainment of exact knowledge based on first-hand information and a soft element which encourages the imaginative and fanciful impulses" (pp. 94-95). In order to prepare young people for lifelong learning, education must initially rid itself of the "misguided idea of the functional separateness of education and schooling from the broader culture" (Oliver and Gershman, 1989, p. 31). Subsequently, we can begin to:

> Work toward a sophisticated theory of deep knowing and being that will raise the most general questions about the quality and destiny of the human species, of nature, and of human participation in nature. It is at this point, for example, that the distinction between the various academic disciplines must break down. For the study of such questions requires that we be able to move between and interrelate the fields of physics, biology, religion, history, and poetry in a single conversation. (p. 30)

Fostering lifelong learning, then, centers around the notion of encouraging students to question even those ideas which seem factual or neutral. In order to do so in ways which can move beyond the formative years into adulthood, we must offer educational opportunities where students link theory to real life experiences, consider and value other "ways of knowing," and integrate

concepts which too often remain separated by curriculum lines. In terms of experiential education, it is then and only then that students will learn how to learn, and learn to question the world around them in ways which can benefit them and those around them throughout their lives as students and as adults.

In terms of forensics, Klopf (1982) writes "The student develops skill in reflexive thinking and reasoning, and learns to perceive the fallacious and shallow reasoning of others" (p. 8). Once competitors learn to accept diverse ways of knowing, they can extend their thinking to decipher fallacious reasoning from supported and grounded reasoning. In impromptu speaking, for example, students must think critically about a quotation, apply it to their lives, and express their interpretation of it based on sound and grounded reasons. In extemporaneous speaking, students must answer a question focused on some contemporary real life event, develop their arguments based on grounded reasons, and support those reasons with evidence. Students competing in these events must foster their critical thinking skills in order to succeed. Further, competitors who listen to their peers in these events also learn to value different views and interpretations of the world. Thus, not only are students developing their critical thinking skills by competing in these events, as audience members they are also fostering their ability to tolerate and value the ideas of others (Klopf, 1982).

Also, as audience members, forensicators develop active and critical listening skills which they will take with them in their careers (Cox, 1991). Critical listening occurs when a message is perceived, understood, evaluated and finally assigned worth (Wolvin and Coakley, 1992). Because the ideas offered by speakers must be relatively diverse to be successful, audience members are afforded ample opportunities to employ and develop their critical thinking and listening skills; skills which future employers will be seeking in their employees and skills which will add to the life of communities as well (Greynolds, 1989).

Conclusions

Forensics is an activity brimming with benefits to those who choose to become involved in it. Its inherent value in the education of students, however, is not always observed by those administrators outside the communication discipline. By linking forensics education with major tenets of experiential education, perhaps some administrators who have not previously appreciated forensics education but do support experiential learning will begin to realize the inherent value of forensics education. Simply put, if experiential learning is real learning, and forensics competition can be explained in experiential learning terminology, then forensics education is inherently real learning, as well.

This paper addressed three major tenets of experiential learning: (1)connecting theoretical knowledge to real life experiences, (2) valuing and fostering different "ways of knowing," and (3) encouraging lifelong learning. Each tenet was embellished with examples as to how forensics serves to foster it. Forensics is certainly an activity. But it is much more than that. Forensics is an activity which fosters learning in the real sense. The forensics activity promotes experiential learning. It has been doing so long before experiential learning became an educational buzz word. Now that education theory has caught up with us, so-to-speak, let's use their own words to justify our existence. Communication educators have realized the inherent value of forensics programs for a long time. Finally, an ideal opportunity has emerged to help administrators comprehend the educational merit, too. Let's take it!

References

Aden, R. (1991). Reconsidering the laboratory metaphor: Forensics as a liberal art. National Forensic Journal, 9 (2), pp. 125-140.

Boileau, D. (1990). The role of department chair as forensic promoter. National Forensic Journal, 8 (1), pp. 87-94.

Buys, W. & Copeland, J. (1985). The need for a speech activity program. Non-Competitive Speech Activities. Lincolnwood, IL: National Textbook Company.

Cox, E. (1991). Assessing and repositioning an educational function of collegiate debate. Proceedings to the 1991 Professional Development Conference: Commitment to Forensic Education: The Challenge to the Twenty-First Century, pp. 139-159.

Dewey, J. (1938). Experience and education. New York: Collier Books.

Faules, Rieke, Rhodes. (1976). Directing forensics: Contest and debate speaking. (2nd ed.). Denver, CO: Morton Publishing Co.

Goodlad, J. (1984). A place called school: Prospects for the future. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Greene, M. (1988). The dialectic of freedom. New York: Teachers College Press.

Greynolds, M. (1989). PKA-Opportunities for campus and community enhancement. Proceedings of the Developmental Conference on the Future Role of Pi Kappa Delta in the Forensic Community, pp. 33-40.

Harris, Jr., Kropp, Jr., and Rosenthal. (1986). The tournament as laboratory : Implications for forensic research. National Forensic Journal, 4 (1), pp. 13-22.

Hendley, B. (1986). Dewey, Russell, Whitehead: Philsophers as educators. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

Hindman, M., Shackelford, J., and Schlottach, K. (1991). Working forensics: A competitor's guide. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company.

Hutchings, P. and Wutzdorff, A. (Eds.). (1988). Knowing and doing: Learning through experience. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Klopf, D. (1982). The forensic program. Coaching and Directing Forensics. Skokie, IL: National Textbook Company.

Koeppel, L. and Morman, M. (1991). Oral interpretation events and argument: Forensic discourse or aesthetic entertainment? National Forensic Journal, 9 (2), pp. 141-153.

Lightfoot, S. (1983). The good high school. New York: Basic Books.

Littlefield, R. (1991). An assessment of university administrators: Do they value competitive debate and individual events programs? National Forensic Journal, 9 (2), pp. 87-96.

McMillan and Todd-Mancillas. (1991). An assessment of the value of individual events in forensics competition from students' perspectives. National Forensic Journal, 9 (1), pp. 1-18.

O'Keefe, V. (1986). Affecting critical thinking through speech. Urbana, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills.

Oliver, D., and Gershman, K. (1989). Education, modernity, and fractured meaning: Toward a process theory of teaching and learning. New York: State University of New York Press.

Rice, J. (1991). Pedagogical objectives for multiple-genre interpretation. National Forensic Journal, 9 (2), pp. 125-140.

Wolvin, A. and Coakley, C. (1992). Listening. (4th ed.). Dubuque, IA: William C. Brown.